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UNCLAS HARARE 001931

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

AF/S FOR DELISI, RAYNOR
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR J. FRAZER

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: DEATH OF VICE-PRESIDENT MUZENDA

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

1. (U) The GOZ officially announced the passing on September 20 of Vice-President Simon Muzenda. The death of the 81-year-old ZANU-PF Politburo member from Masvingo province, who had been critically ill for weeks, was not unexpected. Government sources announced publicly that the Politburo will meet September 21 to finalize a burial date but have said nothing about a replacement.

2. (SBU) COMMENT: The Constitution commits the appointment of the country's two vice-presidents (Joseph Msika is the other) to the President. In making such an appointment, Mugabe would have to weigh carefully the various and potentially fragile geographic, ethnic, and tribal balances within the party. No candidate appears to address relevant balances satisfactorily and making an appointment in the near term could complicate evolving succession plans within the party. Accordingly, with the Party Congress less than three months away, Mugabe is unlikely to be in a hurry to fill the slot. Reported efforts by the party to begin disciplinary hearings against Eddison Zvobgo, a ZANU-PF luminary from Masvingo who broke ranks with the leadership in recent years, may signal party anxieties about rank-and-file loyalties in the late Vice-President's backyard.
SULLIVAN